

Department of Energy

Merit Review Guide

for

**Financial Assistance
and
Unsolicited Proposals**



**Office of Procurement and Assistance Policy
Office of Procurement and Assistance
Management**

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MERIT REVIEW GUIDE FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose: This document provides guidance on conducting merit reviews of financial assistance applications and unsolicited proposals. While program/project officials are encouraged to tailor this guidance to their specific programs, merit reviews should be conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines presented in this document.

Applicability: This guidance applies to merit reviews of financial assistance applications/proposals. Merit reviews are required for all discretionary financial assistance awards: competitive and noncompetitive grants, competitive and noncompetitive cooperative agreements, and unsolicited proposals. Merit reviews are also required for renewals of these awards.

Background: In accordance with Federal requirements, it is Department of Energy (DOE) policy that discretionary financial assistance actions be awarded through a merit-based selection process. Section 600.13 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), provides the regulatory basis for this process and defines Merit Review as a “thorough, consistent and objective examination of applications based on pre-established criteria by persons who are independent of those individuals submitting the applications and who are knowledgeable in the field of endeavor for which support is requested.” The decision-making process for financial assistance awards varies across DOE programs. While selection officials may make award decisions based solely on the merit review results, other considerations, such as program policy factors and the availability of funds, often play an important role. However, in all cases, selection officials rely heavily on the evaluations provided by the merit reviewers in making their selection decisions. In today’s funding environment, it is increasingly important to ensure that merit review evaluations provide a sound basis for decision-making and that selection officials have the maximal amount of useful information on which to base their selection and funding decisions.

II. MERIT REVIEWS

Purpose of Review: The primary purpose of a merit review is to provide an assessment of the technical/scientific merit of an application or an unsolicited proposal through a narrative critique and one or more adjectival or numerical ratings based on pre-established criteria.

The merit review also provides a forum for reviewers to comment on other aspects of the application/proposal (e.g., environmental concerns, human subject and animal welfare concerns, and budgetary considerations) that fall outside the concept of technical/scientific merit per se. While these comments may provide useful information to selection officials, program officials, and Contracting Officers and identify concerns that must be addressed, they should be clearly separated from the discussion (i.e., narrative critique) and rating of technical/scientific merit.

Types of Merit Review: Merit reviews generally fall into two categories: 1) panel reviews where reviewers meet face-to-face or through electronic conferencing to discuss the applications/proposals and 2) mail reviews done by mail or electronic transmission. Merit reviews should be conducted in the most suitable way given the circumstances.

Panel Reviews: Panel reviews are preferred if time and logistics permit convening a merit review panel. Panel reviews are generally conducted on applications received in response to a solicitation. The selection official usually appoints a Merit Review Chair who is responsible for coordinating the evaluation, setting the agenda, and ensuring that the required documentation is prepared. The panel evaluates applications/proposals in accordance with applicable merit review procedures and the rating plan.

Mail Reviews: Mail reviews may be used when it is not efficient to convene a panel. Generally, mail reviews are conducted on noncompetitive applications and unsolicited proposals. These reviews are similar to panel reviews except reviewers do not discuss the application/proposal. The official responsible for the mail review coordinates the evaluation and ensures that the required documentation is prepared. Reviewers evaluate the applications/proposals in accordance with applicable merit review procedures and the rating plan.

Merit Review Procedures: Program offices may develop and implement internal procedures for conducting merit reviews if the procedures are consistent with the guidelines in this document or they may adopt this Guide as their procedures. If a program office chooses to adopt this Guide, the solicitation and/or the rating plan should describe the specific review process for the solicitation. If a Program office chooses to develop its own merit review procedures, the procedures should minimize the administrative burden on reviewers and be stated as clearly and succinctly as possible. The procedures must describe and define:

- The roles and responsibilities of the individuals involved in the selection process within the organization and the roles and responsibilities of other individuals, if the merit review function has been delegated. For example, the procedures should describe the roles and responsibilities of: 1) the program official; 2) the Merit Review Chair or official responsible for the review; 3) the merit reviewers; and 4) the selection official.
- The review process, including the initial screening or review for conformance to administrative and technical requirements, the merit review, and the program policy factors review.
- The decision-making process to be followed by the selection official with regard to the use of the merit review recommendations.
- The documentation needed to support the selection decision.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

Program Officials: Program officials are responsible for:

- Developing the program office's merit review procedures and Program Rules, when appropriate;
- Developing technical descriptions of the areas of interest for inclusion in the solicitation;
- Developing evaluation criteria and instructions for preparing applications;
- Developing a rating plan;
- Selecting merit reviewers, when appropriate;
- Conducting initial screening/reviews for conformance with technical requirements;

- Serving as a resource to the merit review panel prior to discussions, if requested by the Chair. When program officials serve as a resource, they may not participate in the merit review discussions;
- Recommending application of the program policy factors, when appropriate; and
- Performing a technical evaluation of costs on the selected applications/proposals.

Merit Review Chair (or other official responsible for the review): The Merit Review Chair is responsible for:

- Assisting program officials in developing a rating plan, if requested;
- Selecting merit reviewers, when appropriate;
- Preparing the justification for using less than three reviewers;
- Handling all arrangements for the merit review panel meetings.
- Obtaining conflict of interest/confidentiality certificates from the individuals participating in the merit review and selection process;
- Assuring that conflict of interest policies are followed;
- Ensuring that the reviewers follow the rating plan and provide a sound, well documented evaluation;
- Assuring that due consideration is given to input from each reviewer;
- Preparing a summary statement for each application that summarizes the evaluation and the recommendations of the individual merit reviewers;
- Preparing a ranking sheet, if appropriate; and
- Maintaining all merit review documentation.

Contracting Officer: If the applications are received in response to a solicitation, the Contracting Officer is responsible for:

- Concurring with the evaluation criteria and instructions for preparing applications.
- Preparing the solicitation.
- Issuing the Federal Register notice and the solicitation.
- Concurring with the rating plan.
- Advising program officials and Merit Review Chairs on matters relating to soliciting and awarding financial assistance instruments, including conflict of interests and confidentiality of information issues.
- Conducting the initial screening/review for conformance with the solicitation requirements.

The Contracting Officer is always responsible for:

- Evaluating proposed costs.
- Determining whether the applicant is a responsible entity.
- Negotiating the agreement.
- Awarding the agreement.

Selection Official: The Selection Official is responsible for:

- Appointing Merit Review Chairs.
- Appointing merit reviewers, when appropriate.
- Approving the rating plan.
- Approving the review of applications/proposals by less than three reviewers.

- Reviewing summary statements and ranking sheets.
- Applying the program policy factors, when appropriate.
- Selecting applications for award.

IV. SELECTION AND NUMBER OF REVIEWERS

Selection: Merit reviewers may be federal or non-federal individuals. These reviewers must be well qualified, by either training or experience, or both, in the particular scientific or technical fields that are the subjects of the review.

Qualifications: The official selecting reviewers should consider the following:

- The individual's scientific or technical education and experience.
- The extent to which the individual has engaged in relevant work or research, the capacities in which the individual has done so, and the quality of such work or research.
- The need for the review group to include within its membership experts from various specialty areas within relevant scientific or technical fields.

While reviewers must have expertise in the areas addressed in the proposals and sufficient knowledge to judge the merits of the application, the more closely a reviewer's expertise matches an applicant's, the more likely it is that the two could be direct competitors or collaborators. Officials may want to recruit a variety of reviewers, some whose expertise is directly relevant and some, who are knowledgeable but are not working directly in the specific subject area, to act as a check on possible bias. It is highly recommended that program officials use reviewers from outside the program/project office responsible for the financial assistance program.

External Reviewers: External reviewers may be non-DOE federal or non-federal employees. If the application is for research and development, the use of more external reviewers may enhance the quality of the review. External reviewers can bring fresh view points, alternative perspectives, and state-of-the-art understanding to the evaluation process.

Prohibition on Reviewers: The selection official may not be a part of the merit review group. It is highly recommended that the following individuals not be a part of the merit review group: 1) the program official, if the program official reports to and is rated by the selection official; 2) anyone in the direct chain of supervision above the selection official or the program official, such as a Division Director or an Associate Director; and 3) if the program official is a supervisor, none of the employees who report to and are rated by the program official.

Preference: In merit reviewer selection, there should be no preference based on race, ethnic identity, gender, religion, region, age, or institutional affiliation.

Number of Reviewers: Generally, at least three qualified individuals will review each application/proposal. If fewer than three reviewers are used, the official responsible for the merit review must document the reasons, obtain the approval of the selection official, and include this documentation in the merit review file.

V. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Conflicts of Interest: Individuals with a conflict of interest may not participate in the merit review of a financial assistance application or an unsolicited proposal. All merit reviewers and ex officio members of merit review panels must sign a Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificate, in writing or electronically, prior to the beginning of the review process. The reviewer must certify that he/she will not participate in the review of any financial assistance application/proposal involving a particular matter in which the reviewer has a conflict of interest or where a reasonable person may question the reviewer's impartiality. In addition, the reviewer must agree to disclose any actual or perceived conflicts of interest as soon as the reviewer is aware of the conflict. Appendix B provides the Department's CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST/NON-DISCLOSURE CERTIFICATE for Merit Reviewers Involved in the Selection of Financial Assistance Applications or Unsolicited Proposals. The official responsible for the review must obtain signed certificates from all merit reviewers prior to disseminating applications and retain the certificates in the merit review file.

If a merit reviewer becomes aware of a conflict or a situation that may give the appearance of a conflict of interest during the evaluation, the reviewer must immediately disclose the matter to the official responsible for the review or the Contracting Officer. Situations that could be perceived as conflicts of interest may include:

- The application being reviewed was submitted by: a recent student; a recent teacher; a former employer; or a close personal friend or a relative of the reviewer, the reviewer's spouse, or the reviewer's minor children.
- The application being reviewed was submitted by a person with whom the reviewer has had longstanding differences.
- The application being reviewed is similar to projects being conducted by the reviewer or by the reviewer's organization.

The official responsible for the merit review, in consultation with the Contracting Officer and Counsel, will decide if a potential conflict is so remote or inconsequential that there is little or no likelihood that it will affect the integrity of the process. If the potential conflict of interest is significant, the official responsible for the review must avoid or mitigate the conflict. In most cases, reviewers will not be allowed to review or participate in the deliberations on any application where there is even the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Confidentiality and Communications: Information and materials provided in applications and unsolicited proposals are submitted to DOE for the purpose of application/proposal evaluation and may contain trade secrets and/or other privileged or confidential commercial or financial information. Except as provided in the Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificate, these materials must not be shared or discussed with individuals who are not participating in the same evaluation proceedings. Merit reviewers must not solicit opinions on particular applications or parts thereof from experts outside the pertinent merit review group. There must be no direct communications between merit reviewers and applicants. Any request for additional

information or inquiries must be directed to the Contracting Officer or the DOE official responsible for the merit review process. Confidential business or privileged information in applications must not be used to the benefit of the reviewer.

Merit reviewers may not inform principal investigators, their organizations, or anyone else of the recommendations. A breach of confidentiality could deter qualified individuals from serving as merit reviewers and inhibit those who do serve from engaging in free and full discussions. DOE will maintain confidentiality by not releasing the names of the reviewers of a particular application/proposal unless required by law.

VI. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Basis for Rating: The DOE financial assistance regulations require that applications be evaluated against pre-established merit review criteria. These criteria should form the only basis for the rating and the narrative critique of each application.

Development of Criteria: Program officials should develop criteria for solicitations or program rules that include all aspects of technical/scientific merit. The idea is to develop criteria that are conceptually independent of each other, but inclusive when taken together. While criteria will vary from one solicitation to another, the criteria should:

- Focus reviewers attention on the project's underlying merit (i.e., significance, approach, and feasibility). The criteria should focus not only on the technical details of the proposed project but also on the broader importance or potential impact of the project.
- Be easily understood. If the criteria are susceptible to varying interpretations, reviewers will use their own interpretation.
- Be stated as clearly and succinctly as possible.

VII. RATING PLAN

Rating Scale: Program officials (with the assistance of the Merit Review Chair, where appropriate) should develop a rating scale that encourages reviewers to make the finest discriminations they can reliably make.

Scale: Generally the rating scale should:

- Be defined so that larger scale values represent greater degrees of merit and smaller values represent smaller degrees (e.g. On a scale of 0 to 5, 5 represents the highest degree of merit and 0 represents an absence of merit).
- Include an appropriate number of scale positions to permit reliable differentiations among applications. If there are too many increments on the scale, the differences between increments may not be reliable or meaningful. If there are too few increments, the differences will not be apparent. The scale should have at least five steps (0-4) and not more than 11 steps (0-10).
- Include "zero" or "unacceptable" at the low end of the scale to offer reviewers a scale position that indicates a complete absence of merit relative to the criterion being rated.
- Induce reviewers to use the entire scale in order to make the differentiations that they need to make.

Scale Definitions: The comparability of ratings across reviewers and review groups requires that all reviewers use the rating scale in the same way. Thus, it is imperative that the various scale positions be well defined so that all reviews are calibrated in the same way and so that an adjective or numerical rating will represent the same cognitive appraisal by different reviewers. Program officials should clearly and, to the extent possible, precisely define the scale positions in their rating plans.

Rating Method: Program officials should determine how the applications will be rated and describe the method in the rating plan. Specifically, program officials must decide:

1. Whether to assign a single rating of merit for the application or whether to rate each criteria separately.
 - **Overall rating of merit:** Under this system, merit reviewers assign a single, overall rating of merit for the application taking into consideration all the evaluation criteria.
 - **Criteria ratings:** Under this system, merit reviewers assign a separate rating to each criteria. An overall rating of merit may then be derived by averaging the criteria ratings, totaling the ratings, or assigning specific weights to the ratings and adding the totals. The plan must state if and how the overall rating of merit will be calculated.
2. Whether to use individual ratings or consensus ratings.
 - **Individual rating method:** Under this system, each reviewer prepares an independent rating/ratings for each application based on the pre-established criteria. The individual rating method is always used for mail reviews and may be used for panel reviews. The merit review score is derived by averaging or totaling the merit reviewers' overall ratings (see overall rating of merit and criteria rating above).
 - **Consensus rating method:** Under this system, the merit review panel develops a consensus rating/ratings based on the pre-established criteria and a consensus narrative critique for each application. The consensus rating/ratings reflects the collective opinion of all the merit reviewers regarding only the scientific/technical merit of the application.

Weighting: It may be appropriate to weight the evaluation criteria under specific circumstances. Program officials should decide if and how the criteria should be weighted. If the evaluation criteria are weighted, the solicitation must provide the weight or relative importance of each criteria. The rating plan and the instructions to the merit reviewers should clearly describe the weighting system to be used.

Rating Plan for Noncompetitive Applications and Unsolicited Proposals: Appendix C provides the Department's rating plan for noncompetitive applications and unsolicited proposals.

VIII. CONDUCT OF REVIEWS

Conduct of Panel Reviews: Generally, panel reviews will be conducted as follows:

Prior to the panel meeting: The Merit Review Chair or official responsible for the review should:

- Obtain signed Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificates prior to disseminating applications.
- Provides reviewers copies of the evaluation criteria, the rating plan and/or merit review procedures, and application preparation instructions.
- Provide copies of the applications and instructions for protecting and returning the applications.

Reviewers must:

- Sign the Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificate.
- Read and understand the evaluation criteria, the rating plan and/or merit review procedures, and application preparation instructions.
- Evaluate each application (except those that present a conflict of interest or an appearance of a conflict).
- Prepare preliminary comments on the merits of the application in accordance with the merit review evaluation criteria. The rating plan should provide instructions on how to prepare these preliminary comments.
- Be prepared to discuss each application at the meeting.

Procedures During the Meeting: Generally, the Chair will introduce each application, call upon individual reviewers to present their comments, and invite discussion. At the appropriate time, the Chair will request each member to individually prepare a rating (or ratings) and a narrative critique for each application. If the rating plan calls for a consensus rating, the Chair will ensure that a consensus is reached and that a consensus narrative critique is prepared for each application.

Documentation: The Chair or the official responsible for the review should ensure that the following documents are prepared:

- Summary Statement for each application.
- Ranking Sheet, if appropriate.

Conduct of Mail Reviews: :

Prior to the review: The official responsible for the mail review must:

- Obtain signed Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificates prior to disseminating applications.
- Provide reviewers copies of the evaluation criteria, the rating plan and/or the merit review procedures, application preparation instructions, a review form, and instructions for completing the review form.
- Provide copies of the applications and instructions for protecting and returning the applications.

Review: Reviewers must:

- Sign the Conflict-of-Interest/Non-Disclosure Certificate;
- Read and understand the evaluation criteria, rating plan and/or merit review procedures; application preparation instructions, and instructions for completing the review form;
- Evaluate each application (except those that present a conflict of interest or an appearance of a conflict);

- Provide a narrative critique that addresses each evaluation criterion;
- Assign a rating or ratings that reflect the reviewer's opinion of the merit of the application in accordance with the specific evaluation criteria; and
- Complete the review form;

Documentation: The official responsible for the review should:

- Record the individual ratings and calculate the score.
- Prepare a summary statement for each application.
- Prepare a ranking sheet, if appropriate.

Documents may be sent by mail or through electronic transmission, if the system is secure.

IX. DOCUMENTATION

Summary Statement: The summary statement is the official merit review record and recommendation for each application/proposal reviewed. It provides the selection official an assessment of the technical/scientific merit of the application. The summary statement should summarize the information contained in the individual evaluations. It may also identify issues that fall outside the scope of technical merit, but which need to be addressed by the program official or the contracting officer, such as environmental or human subjects concerns. The narrative critique in the summary statement may be used for debriefings or be sent to the applicant's principal investigator or project director, since these comments provide valuable information for improving the project or for preparing future applications.

Responsibility: The Merit Review Chair or the official responsible for the review is responsible for the preparation of a summary statement for each application/proposal reviewed. The summary statements for a group of applications may be compiled into one consolidated report provided the information described below is included in the report.

Content: A recommended Merit Review Summary Statement Format is provided at Appendix D. The summary statement should include the following features, if appropriate:

- Solicitation/Program Rule Number
- Applicant
- Application Number
- City/State
- Project Title
- Brief Description of the Project
- Proposed budget
- Rating - Individual rating/ratings or consensus rating/ratings
- Score
- Narrative Critique: This section should reflect the merit reviewers' assessment of the scientific/technical merit of application. It should summarize the salient features of the individual or consensus comments of the reviewers and the primary reasons for the score. This critique should address each of the criteria and highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the application with respect to these criteria.

- Special Note (where applicable): This section should include any comments on aspects of the application that are important to the selection official, program official and the contracting officer, but fall outside of the evaluation criteria, such as environmental or human subjects concerns. This section should also identify any unusual rating or scoring issues, such as a wide variance in individual ratings (e.g., overall ratings of 10, 8, and 0).
- Recommendation

Ranking Sheet: A recommended Merit Review Ranking Sheet Format is provided at Appendix E. The Merit Review Chair or official responsible for the review must prepare a matrix which ranks the applications reviewed by scores, if appropriate. The application with the highest score will be ranked number one. The ranking sheet and the individual summary statements will be provided to the selection official and the official reviewing the program policy factors. The ranking sheet should include the Solicitation/Program Rule number and the following information for each applicant:

- Applicant's name
- Project Title
- Project Period
- Proposed Budget
- Score

GLOSSARY

Application: A written request for financial assistance.

Award: The written document executed by a DOE Contracting Officer, after an application is approved, which contains the terms and conditions for providing financial assistance to the recipient.

Discretionary Award: An award under authority of a Federal statute that permits DOE to exercise judgment in selecting the recipient and the project to be supported and in determining the amount of the award.

Financial Assistance: Transfer of money or property to a recipient or subrecipient to accomplish a public purpose of support or stimulation authorized by Federal statute through grants or cooperative agreements and subawards. In DOE, it does not include direct loans, loan guarantees, price guarantees, purchase agreements, Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs), or any other type of financial incentive instrument.

Merit Review: A thorough, consistent, and objective examination of applications based on pre-established criteria by persons who are independent of those submitting the application and who are knowledgeable in the field of endeavor for which support is requested.

Narrative Critique: Written comments on the strengths and weaknesses of an application/proposal with respect to each of the evaluation criteria.

Principal Investigator: The researcher, scientist, or other individual designated by the recipient to direct the research and development aspect of the project.

Program Official: The person responsible for managing the financial assistance program.

Program Policy Factors: Factors that, while not appropriate indicators of the application's merit, are essential to the process of choosing which applications will best achieve the program objectives. For example, program policy factors may reflect the desirability of selecting projects based on geographic distribution, diverse approaches, or complementary efforts. Such factors should be specified in the solicitation or program rule to notify applicants that factors essentially beyond their control will affect the selection process.

Program Rule: A rule issued by a DOE program office for the award and administration of financial assistance which may describe the program's purpose or objectives, eligibility requirements for applicants, types of program activities or areas to be supported, evaluation and selection process, cost sharing requirements, etc. These rules usually supplement the generic policies and procedures for financial assistance contained in 10 CFR 600.

Ranking Sheet: A chart which ranks the applications reviewed by merit review scores from the highest to the lowest.

Renewal Award: An award which adds one or more additional budget periods to an existing project period. The project period is the total period of time indicated in an award during which DOE expects to provide financial assistance.

Score: The consolidated number or adjective that reflects the overall judgment of scientific/technical merit of all the merit reviewers of a specific application. For example, the score may be the average rating, totaled ratings of a set of individual reviewers, or the overall consensus rating of a set of reviewers.

Solicitation: A document which requests the submission of applications for financial assistance and which describes program objectives, recipient and project eligibility requirements, desired performance activity, evaluation criteria, award terms and conditions, and other relevant information about the financial assistance opportunity.

Summary Statement: The official merit review record of a financial assistance request for support. It contains the reviewers' assessment of the scientific/technical merit of the application.

Unsolicited application/proposal: A written request for DOE support of a project which is submitted without a solicitation made by DOE.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST/NON-DISCLOSURE CERTIFICATE

For

Merit Reviewers Involved in the Selection of
Financial Assistance Applications or Unsolicited Proposals

The Department of Energy has a policy that individuals with a conflict of interest cannot participate in the merit review of a financial assistance application. This certification must be completed by individuals prior to their participation in the merit review process.

1. I will not participate in the review of any financial assistance application involving a particular matter that would have a direct and predictable effect on any person, company or organization with which I have a relationship, financial or otherwise. For purposes of this statement, the interests of my spouse, my minor child, my general partner, any organization in which I serve as officer, director, trustee, general partner, or employee, and any person or organization with whom I am negotiating employment, are attributed to me.

2. Further, I will not participate in the review of any financial assistance application involving a particular person or a particular matter that I believe would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question my impartiality.

3. Prior to my participation as a merit reviewer, I agree that I will disclose any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that I may have with such duties. In addition, I agree to disclose any actual or perceived conflicts of interest as soon as I am aware of the conflict.

4. I certify that I will not disclose, except pursuant to the order of a court of competent jurisdiction, any information concerning the assessment and analysis or the content of applications/proposals either during the proceedings of the merit review or at any subsequent time, to anyone who is not authorized access to the information by the Department of Energy or by law or regulation, and then only to the extent that such information is required in connection with such person's official responsibilities. Furthermore, I will report to the DOE Official responsible for the process any communication concerning the assessment and analysis or the individuals involved in the assessment and selection and activities directed to me from any source outside this process.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Note: For Merit Reviewers who are Federal employees, the same conflict of interest statutes and regulations that apply to you in your regular Government employment apply to you as participants in the review of a financial assistance application.

RATING PLAN FOR NONCOMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS AND UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS

Noncompetitive applications and unsolicited proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the following procedures:

Noncompetitive Financial Assistance Determination

Prior to initiating a merit review of a noncompetitive financial assistance application, the program official must determine that the application satisfies one or more of the selection criteria set forth in 10 CFR Part 600.6(c). This determination must be approved by the individuals identified in 10 CFR Part 600.6(d). If the proposal is accepted as an unsolicited proposal, the conditions set forth in 10 CFR Part 600.6(c)(7) must be satisfied.

Official Responsible for the Review: The official responsible for the review must:

- Select qualified reviewers.
- Obtain a conflict of interest/non-disclosure certificates from each merit reviewer prior to beginning the review.
- Ensure that the reviewers have a copy of this rating plan and understand the process, their role, and the criteria upon which the applications are to be evaluated.
- Provide reviewers copies of the applications and instructions for protecting and returning them.
- Ensure that each reviewer follows this rating plan and provides a sound, well documented evaluation.
- Record the individual ratings and calculate the score.
- Prepare a summary statement for the application/proposal, which summarizes the evaluation and the recommendations of the individual merit reviewers.
- Maintain all merit review documentation.

Evaluation Criteria: The application/proposal will be evaluated in accordance with the following three criteria:

1. **Significance:** The extent to which the project, if successfully carried out, will make an important and/or original contribution to the field of endeavor.
2. **Approach:** The extent to which the concept, design, methods, analyses, and technologies are properly developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project.
3. **Feasibility:** The likelihood that the proposed work can be accomplished within the proposed budget by the investigators or the technical staff, given their experience and expertise, past progress, available resources, institutional/organizational commitment, and (if appropriate) access to technologies.

Rating Scale and Definitions: Reviewers will use the following numerical scale to rate the applications/proposals:

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Adjective</u>	<u>Definition</u>
5	Excellent	Outstanding application/proposal in all respects; deserves highest priority for support
4	Very Good	High quality application/proposal in nearly all respects; should be supported if at all possible.
3	Good	A quality application/proposal; worthy of support.
2	Fair	Application/proposal lacking in one or more critical aspects; key issues were not addressed.
1	Poor	Application/proposal has serious deficiencies.
0	Unacceptable	Application/proposal has no merit

Review Process: Each Merit Reviewer must independently review the application/proposal and complete the attached Review Form for Noncompetitive Applications and Unsolicited Proposals. Reviewers should:

- Provide a narrative critique (i.e., written comments) for each of the three evaluation criteria. Reviewers should note any unusually high or low cost-effectiveness under the feasibility criteria.
- Assign a single overall rating of merit; this rating should reflect the overall merit of the application/proposal based on the consideration of the three evaluation criteria.
- If appropriate, comment on aspects of the application/proposal that fall outside the evaluation criteria review (e.g., environmental or human subject concerns).
- Provide a recommendation for funding.
- Provide phone and fax number.
- Sign and date the review form.

Summary Statement: The official responsible for the review must calculate the average rating to determine the applicant's score and prepare a summary statement for each application or proposal in accordance with the requirements of Section IX of the Merit Review Guide. The summary statement is the official merit review record and provides the selection official an assessment of the technical/scientific merit of the application/proposal.

Attachment to Appendix C: REVIEW FORM FOR NONCOMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS AND UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS

**REVIEW FORM FOR
NONCOMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS AND UNSOLICITED PROPOSALS**

Application/Proposal No:

Applicant:

Project Title:

Evaluation Criteria

1. **Significance:** The extent to which the project, if successfully carried out, will make an original and/or important contribution to the field of endeavor.
2. **Approach:** The extent to which the concept, design, methods, analyses, and technologies are properly developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project.
3. **Feasibility:** The likelihood that the proposed work can be accomplished within the proposed budget by the investigators or the technical staff, given their experience and expertise, past progress, available resources, institutional/organizational commitment, and (if appropriate) access to technologies. Note any unusually high or low cost-effectiveness.

Narrative Critique: Provide written comments for each of the evaluation criterion on a separate sheet/sheets. Your specific comments on the proposal's strengths and weaknesses with respect to the evaluation criteria are critical to the evaluation process.

Rating Scale: Assign a single rating that reflects the overall merit of the application/proposal based on your consideration of the three evaluation criteria. Check one:

	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Adjective</u>	<u>Definition</u>
_____	5	Excellent	Outstanding application/proposal in all respects; deserves highest priority for support.
_____	4	Very Good	High quality application/proposal in nearly all respects; should be supported if at all possible.
_____	3	Good	A quality application/proposal; worthy of support.
_____	2	Fair	Application/proposal lacking in one or more critical aspects; key issues were not addressed.
_____	1	Poor	Application/proposal has serious deficiencies.
_____	0	Unacceptable	Application/proposal has no merit.

Special Note: If appropriate, provide comments below or on a separate sheet on aspects of the proposal that fall outside of the evaluation criteria review (e.g., environmental or human subjects concerns). Special Note Comments attached: _____ Yes _____ No

Recommendation: Check one.

_____ Fund project.
_____ Fund in part (Describe which part)

_____ Reject
_____ Other (Explain)

Reviewer:

Name:
E-mail Address:
Phone:

Signature _____ Date: _____

SUMMARY STATEMENT FORMAT

Solicitation/Program Rule No:

Applicant:
Application No:
City, State:

Project Title:
Brief Description of Project:
Proposed Budget:

Rating: (Individual rating/ratings or consensus rating/ratings)

Score:

Narrative Critique: (Address each criterion)

Special Note: (Identify unusual rating or scoring issues, such as a wide variance in individual ratings (i.e., overall ratings of 10, 8, and 0). Comments on aspects of the application that fall outside of the evaluation criteria, such as human subject or environmental concerns.

Recommendation: Fund Project _____ Yes; _____ No; _____ Partial (explain)
(In the event there is a lack of unanimity in the individual rating sheets, provide rationale for the recommendation.)

Signature: _____
(Merit Review Chair or Official
Responsible for the Review)

Date: _____

RANKING SHEET FORMAT**Solicitation/Program Rule No:**

Applicant*	Project Title	Project Period	Total Proposed Budget	Proposed Budget Year One	Score
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
....					
....					
....					
...					
...					
* List in order of merit review scores from the highest to the lowest					